

Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1-28. (Canceled)

29. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser~~ A laser welding apparatus, in which apparatus comprising a laser head, plasma suppression means, and gas extraction means in which,
the laser head focuses a laser beam is impinged upon a component to be
welded-welded, at a laser beam impingement point,
the laser welding apparatus is adapted to move the laser beam relative to the
workpiece in a welding direction,
the wherein plasma suppression means is arranged to impinge a jet of gas on
the component in the welding direction, at an angle between about 38° and about 52° to its the
component surface, flowing towards the laser beam impingement point, at a distance of at
least 1 mm from least 1 mm from the laser beam axis, such that the gas is deflected across the
laser beam-beam,
and the gas is extracted by the extraction means located adjacent the laser
beam, diametrically opposite the plasma suppression means.

30. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser~~ A laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 29
wherein the laser welding apparatus comprises a laser head to focus the laser beam on the
laser beam impingement point, and there is provided a nozzle adjacent the laser head that, in
use, provides a jet of high velocity gas over the laser head.

31-32. (Canceled)

33. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser~~ A laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim-32
29 wherein the plasma suppression means is adapted to supply gas to impinge the component
at an angle of about 45°.

34. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 29 wherein the plasma suppression means is adapted to supply gas at a rate of between about 10 and 18 litres per minute.

35. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 34 wherein the plasma suppression means is adapted to supply gas at a rate of about 14 litres per minute.

36. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 29 wherein the plasma suppression means comprises tubular supply means.

37. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 36 wherein the inner diameter of the tubular supply means is between about 6 mm and about 10 mm.

38. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 29 wherein the gas supplied by the plasma suppression means is an inert gas.

39. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 29 wherein the plasma suppression means is adapted to supply gas to impinge the component at a distance of between about 1 mm and about 5 mm from the laser beam.

40. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 39 wherein the plasma suppression means is adapted to supply gas to impinge the component at a distance of about 4 mm from the laser beam.

41. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 29 wherein the plasma suppression means is arranged such that the gas exits the suppression means at a distance from the component surface of between about 2 mm and about 5 mm.

42. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A~~ laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 41 wherein the plasma suppression means is arranged such that the gas exits the suppression means at a distance from the component surface of about 2 mm.

43. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A laser~~ welding apparatus as claimed in claim 30 wherein the nozzle is a spray head nozzle.

44. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A laser~~ welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 30 wherein the high velocity gas exits the secondary supply means at, at least, 30 m/s.

45. (Currently Amended) ~~Laser-A laser~~ welding apparatus as claimed in Claim 30 wherein the exit nozzle comprises a row of small tubular outlets.

46. (Currently Amended) A laser welding apparatus as claimed in Claim ~~34~~ 29 wherein the gas extraction means lies between about 2 mm and about 5 mm ~~from~~ from the surface of the component.

47. (Currently Amended) A method of laser welding a component comprising the steps of, of:

_____ focusing a laser beam via a cover slide on substrate component, moving onto the component to generate a weld pool,

_____ moving the component relative to the laser beam such that the laser beam impingement point moves in a welding direction,

_____ and supplying a using plasma suppression means to direct plasma suppression gas to impinge the component adjacent the laser beam impingement point, wherein the gas flow is arranged to impinge the component point at an angle of between 30° and about 60° and 60° to the component surface, and surface, at a distance from the laser beam of at least 1 mm, least 1 mm,

_____ wherein the plasma suppression gas impinges the component surface adjacent the weld pool at a point that lies behind the laser impingement point in the welding direction such that the plasma suppression gas is deflected across the laser beam and extracted via gas extraction means provided adjacent the laser beam, diametrically opposite the plasma suppression means.

48. (Canceled)